DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 429 CG 016 562

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TITLE College Female Perceptions of Career Directions.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (Washington, DC, October 13-16, 1982)
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; *Career Planning; Careers; College Students; *Females; Higher Education; *Home Economics Education; Leadership; *Occupational Aspiration; Professional Development; Professional Occupations

ABSTRACT

College home economics students are entering a greater variety of home economics and related professions upon graduation than ever before. Freshmen (N=542) and graduating seniors (N=463) enrolled in the College of Home Economics at Oklahoma State University completed a questionnaire that included multiple choice and Likert-type scale items as well as open-ended questions requesting information on career goals and ambitions. Analyses of results showed that 65% of the freshmen and 55% of the seniors considered it extremely important to have a career in which the results of their endeavors could be seen, and which would offer good opportunities for advancement and a secure future. Only a small percentage of students saw careers as an opportunity to earn a lot of money, gain respect from professional peers, or as a means of gaining high status and prestige. Seniors showed the influence of career planning, with fewer graduating in the areas of home economics education and foods and nutrition and more pursuing jobs in the clothing, textiles, and merchandising areas. (PAS)

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COLLEGE FEMALE PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER DIRECTIONS

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CG 016562

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College Female Perceptions of Career Directions

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College home economics students are preparing for new and exciting career opportunities. Prepared graduates entering a greater variety of home economics and related professions than ever before. Even though this is a time of energy shortage and economic adjustments, most students see the future as holding many opportunities and are quite optimistic about their career ambitions.

Home economics college students are not overly concerned about employment opportunities because they feel training in home economics will prepare them adequately for future employment possibilities. A majority of home economics students included in a freshmen/senior career aspiration study at Oklahoma State University perceive that upon graduation they will enter a professional field related to their training or possibly pursue an advanced degree to open other career opportunities. This present study shows over 41 percent of women freshmen and 56 percent of women seniors anticipate employment in their professional field of study upon graduation.

Changes in attitudes, values, and life goals occur as college students mature and progress from incoming freshmen to graduating seniors. It is very likely by the time a student becomes a senior he or she will have changed their major area of emphasis several times. Fifty-nine percent of women seniors surveyed indicated they had considered various career options and changed their college major at least once before finally choosing their present career direction.

METHODOLOGY

This report includes some of the findings from an ongoing study of female students enrolled in the College of Home Economics at Oklahoma State University. Students enrolled in career courses designed for all incoming home economics freshmen (N=542) and graduating seniors (N=463) were sampled. A questionnaire was designed after reviewing prior research (Almquist and Angrist, 1970; Bachman and Johnston, 1979; Dickerson and Hinkel, 1978; Helson, 1972; Ries, 1977; and Tangri, 1972) and includes multiple choice and Likert-type scale items as well as open-ended questions requesting discussion of career ambitions.

Each questionnaire took approximately thirty minutes to complete and was administered in a scheduled class during a period from Fall 1979 through Fall 1981 academic semesters. Oklahoma State's research team continues to gather career data and is building longitudinal data files on home economics students. One note of clarification, because of the small number of male students presently enrolled in undergraduate programs in home economics, males were deleted from the present analysis.

CAREER GOALS

In this survey students were asked to rate the importance of a 10 item list of major career goals. Response categories ranged from "Extremely important," "Quite important," "Somewhat important," to "Not important." Focusing on the "Extremely important" category allowed for evaluating and rating a student's priorities. It is clearly shown among all the students surveyed, a vast majority indicated choosing a career that was interesting to do was of extreme importance to their career goals (TABLE 1). Also illustrated in Table 1, most freshmen and senior students want to make use of their special skills. Almost 65 percent of the freshmen and 55 percent

of the seniors consider it extremely important to have a career in which they can see the results of their endevors, and which offer good opportunities for advancement and a secure future. Less than half of the freshmen students consider it important that their career be worthwhile to society. It is interesting to note only a small percentage of students see their career as an opportunity to earn a good deal of money, gain respect from professional peers, or as a means of gaining high status and prestige.

Table 1

CAREER GOALS

Student Ratings of Factors Extremely Important In A Career

SENIORS	FRESHMEN	
87.8%	91.3%	Something interesting to do
66.8%	69.5%	Ability to use special skills
55.3%	64.5%	Ability to see results of endevors
46.0%	53.6%	Chances for advancement
27.5%	48.1%	A career that is predictable and offers a secure future
51.2%	42.9%	A career that is worthwhile to society
40.0%	37.2%	Chance to make new friends
23.6%	34.2%	To earn a good deal of money
22.1%	26.3%	A career in which you are respected by others
8.3%	15.4%	A career that offers high status and prestige

CAREER AMBITIONS

First year college students are interested but limited in their understanding of the career options in home economics. The first few weeks are filled with questions and caution as they begin to adjust to college life, course-

work, new friendships, relationships, and decision making related to career choices. Many entering freshmen (41.2%) perceive themselves studying in the area of clothing, textiles, and merchandising (TABLE 2). They invision themselves as owners of clothing or fabric stores, as fashion designers, and buyers for large department stores in metropolitan areas. Less than 1 in 10 freshmen students indicates an interest in studying home economics education and food and nutrition for professional development.

Table 2

CAREER DIRECTIONS IN HOME ECONOMICS

SENIORS	FRESHMEN	
28.3%	41.2%	Clothing, Textiles, and Merchandising
21.3 %	20.1%	Housing, Design, and Consumer Resources
21.8%	16.4%	Family Relations and Child Development
14.0%	8.7%	Home Economics Education and Community Services
9.9%	6.2%	Food, Nutrition and Institutional Administration

The reality of career planning has influenced students by the time they are seniors, and many changes have taken place. The numbers of graduating seniors majoring in clothing, textiles, and merchandising, housing, design, and consumer resources, and family relations and child development (TABLE 2) have almost equalized. Percentage-wise fewer students are graduating in the professional areas of home economics education and foods and nutrition.

SPECULATION OF THE FUTURE

If the current trend continues more women will be entering the labor force yearly. Records of labor force participation indicate only a few decades ago less than 25 to 30 percent of all women were labor force

participants while projections for the 1990's suggest that 70 to 80% of all women will be gainfully employed (Mashick and Bare, 1980). Home economics as a discipline offers study in many areas that can provide goods and services to people--people who participate in the labor force and those who are the recipients of the labor force.

Students of home economics develop skills in human relationship, management, organization, marketing, decision-making, and problem solving. The ability to be flexible, adaptable, and creative are stressed as a part of professional development. Home economics has the challenge to assist young people in developing necessary leadership skills needed in the labor force of the future.

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